

HEALTH REPORT

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- EMBARGOED UNTIL 1AM MONDAY 13 MARCH 2006 -

AUSSIE SMOKERS BURY THEIR HEADS IN THE SAND

Smokers are gambling with their lives by not acknowledging their chances of developing a common life-threatening respiratory disease, according to new research released today.

Despite being the highest-risk group for chronic lung disease, people who smoke on a daily basis are less likely than the rest of the population to consider themselves at risk of developing Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

The research, published in the latest issue of the Pfizer Australia Health Report, was conducted by Stollznow Research for the Australian Lung Foundation (ALF), and researched-based medicines company, Pfizer Australia.

COPD is a chronic lung disease which usually occurs in people who have smoked or continue to smoke cigarettes. It is a group of disorders that includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Interestingly, people who previously smoked but have quit have a higher awareness of the link between smoking and COPD and this is likely to have played a role in their decision to quit smoking.

According to Professor Peter Frith, Chairman of the ALF's national COPD program, this research highlights that smokers are not taking their lung health seriously.

"For the majority of smokers, lung health does not come to mind and the 'don't smoke' message is being ignored.

"People need to realise that every cigarette causes irreversible lung damage. The good news is that it's never too soon or too late to give up smoking," he said.

Another key finding is that ignorance about COPD is not confined to smokers.

Almost two-thirds of Australians don't know what COPD is; one third believe that COPD is a condition only seen in retirement years; and just over one-in-10 mistakenly think COPD is asthma.

Additionally, only 20 percent of people who smoke on a daily basis ask their doctor about lung health during check-ups.



COPD is more common than people realise. The ALF estimates that up to one-in-six people over 45 are affected by the condition. Of those, around three-quarters aren't aware they have the disease.

"Many people put off seeing their doctor because they mistake their symptoms for signs of ageing or a lack of fitness. It isn't until simple actions such as going for a short walk or tying their shoes become difficult that they realise their condition is more serious and consult their doctor.

"There is no cure for COPD, but there are steps you can take to help you breathe more easily with activities and improve your quality of life. Additionally, the sooner you realise something might be wrong with your lungs and quit smoking the bigger the improvement is," said Professor Frith.

The ALF recommends people who are 45 or over should speak with their GP if they have any of the following:

- Shortness of breath compared with others their age
- A repetitive cough with phlegm / mucus most days
- And a history of cigarette smoking (now or in the past)

The ALF is here to help you understand and best manage your COPD. For further information, contact 1800 654 301 or visit www.lungnet.com.au.

To assist with educating the public about COPD, The Australian Lung Foundation has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

The findings on Australian perceptions of COPD are based on responses from 1,354 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in August 2005 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

Pfizer Australia is the nation's leading research-based health care company, investing over \$A42m in local research and development annually. It discovers, develops, manufactures and markets innovative medical treatments for both humans and animals. For more information, visit www.pfizer.com.au.

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NB: INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL SPOKESPEOPLE ARE ALSO AVAILABLE

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